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# Will persistent denial of a chemical weapons modernization program lower the nuclear threshold in Europe?

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By Louis G. Fields, Jr.

*The Soviet Union expands and upgrades its chemical weapons arsenals, and confirmed reports of chemical attacks in the Iran/Iraq conflict continue. The NATO alliance is forced into considering nuclear response to chemical warfare.*

One of the significant underlying questions in the current Congressional debate on binary chemical weapons funding is the effect of continued U.S. restraint in modernizing its deficient and deteriorating chemical weapons stockpile. The recently published *Soviet Military Supremacy* co-authored by Quentin Crommelin, Jr., and David Sullivan, presents a frightening contrast of U.S./Soviet capabilities in modern chemical munitions. According to these well-informed authors, the USSR "enjoys *at least* a 1,000 to 1 advantage in deliverable modern chemical munitions" and "a 35 to 1 advantage over the United States in *defending* against chemical and biological attack."

The Institute for Defense Analyses' *Summary Report of its Chemical Warfare Study* (done by a distinguished military panel led by General Frederick Kroesen) confirms authoritatively the serious threat posed by a modern, versatile and deliverable Soviet chemical arsenal, the devastating impact of those weapons on the capability and effectiveness of even fully warned and prepared forces and NATO's "inadequate defense and lack of any significant retaliatory capability."

Given these facts, it would be incredibly naive to ignore the gravity of this dangerous imbalance in an abhorrent, but highly effective, weapon system. This is especially true at a time when a U.N. team of impartial experts confirms the use of lethal chemical agents in the Iran/Iraq war by a party to the 1925 Geneva Protocol outlawing such use.

A 1983 White Paper on the Security of the Federal Republic of Germany prepared by the Ministry of Defense reports that "Soviet military doctrine still considers the use of chemical agents a means of warfare" and that "the Soviet Union has consistently been improving both the chemical defense (sic) capability and offensive capability of her forces." It found that "in (NATO), possession of a chemical deterrent potential is confined to the United States, and is limited;" whereupon, the White Paper concludes: "To deter the Warsaw Pact from using chemical weapons, NATO relies mainly upon its conventional and *nuclear* forces." (Emphasis added.)

In reaching its conclusion, the White Paper recognizes that, despite years of negotiation, a comprehensive convention banning chemical weapons has "failed to materialize." Having spent the past three years as the U.S. Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva where this effort is centered, I can say that there is little likelihood that one will materialize in the foreseeable future. Despite our initiative in tabling a draft comprehensive treaty to ban these weapons, the soviet delegation has been unwilling to address seriously the difficult but indispensable issue of verification by systematic international on-site inspection, considered by most delegations as a *sine qua non* to an effective ban.

Without a complete, effective and verifiable chemical weapons ban, we are left with the fearsome specter of lowering the nuclear threshold in the event of a conventional attack against NATO by the Warsaw Pact utilizing its modernized chemical superiority. I, for one, prefer the President's approach to this problem. He has requested funding for a modernization program which would

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